

NAVY MEDICINE LIVE

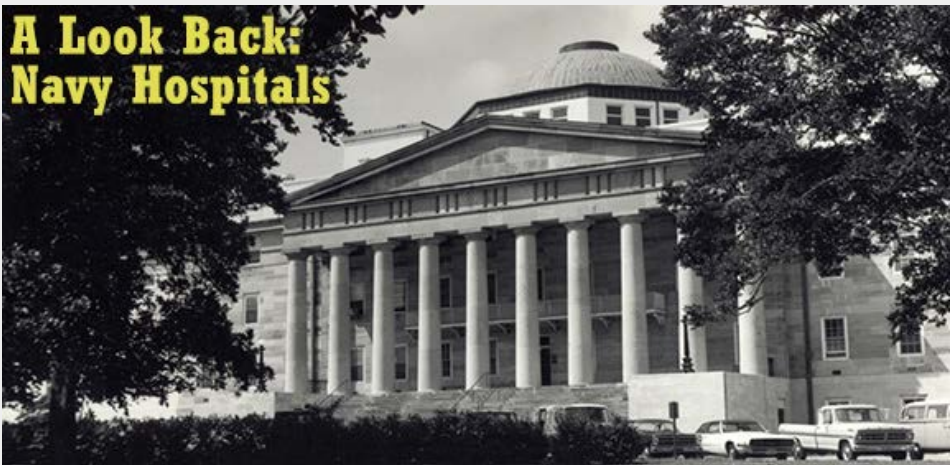
THE OFFICIAL BLOG OF U.S. NAVY AND MARINE CORPS HEALTH CARE • 2011 & 2012 WINNER OF BEST NAVY BLOG

Written on FEBRUARY 26, 2014 AT 3:21 PM by VKREMER

The Early Years of Navy Hospitals: From 1804 to Present

Filed under HOSPITALS, NAVY HISTORY, U.S. NAVY (NO COMMENTS)

By Andre Sobocinski, historian, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery



Naval Hospital Portsmouth, building 1. First Naval Hospital to open in 1830. (BUMED archives)

Two hundred and ten years ago, Navy Surgeon Edward Cutbush established Naval Syracuse, Sicily to provide medical support for the Mediterranean Fleet then engaged in war with the Barbary States (1). Although other medical facilities did exist around this time, Naval Hospital Syracuse was the first hospital to be established by order of the Secretary of the Navy.

In the early years of Navy Medicine, our “hospitals” were often located on or near Navy yards along the Eastern seaboard (2). At best they were makeshift facilities offering a modicum of care; at worse they were simply shelters from the elements (3). Navy Surgeon William P.C. Barton, an early proponent for upgrading hospital would describe one such hovel, “I have myself seen a number of sick seamen with whom I was left in charge at the Navy Yard, Philadelphia, where they were necessarily huddled into a miserable house, scarcely large enough to accommodate the eight part of their number—a spirit of impatience and even of revolt...so wretched was the hovel and so destitute every necessary comfort for sick persons... [that] every man who gathered sufficient strength and was successful in getting an opportunity to effect his escape, absconded immediately.” (4)

The Navy took its first giant leap forward in the cause of hospitalization, Feb. 26, 1811. On this day, Congress approved an act establishing the first

Navy Medicine Video

Navy Medicine is a global healthcare network of 63,000 Navy medical personnel around the world who provide high quality health care to more than one million eligible beneficiaries. Navy Medicine personnel deploy with Sailors and Marines worldwide, providing critical mission support aboard ship, in the air, under the sea and on the battlefield.

Navy Medicine Social Media

 Follow us on Twitter

 Join us on Facebook

 Read our publications

 View our photo stream

 Watch our videos

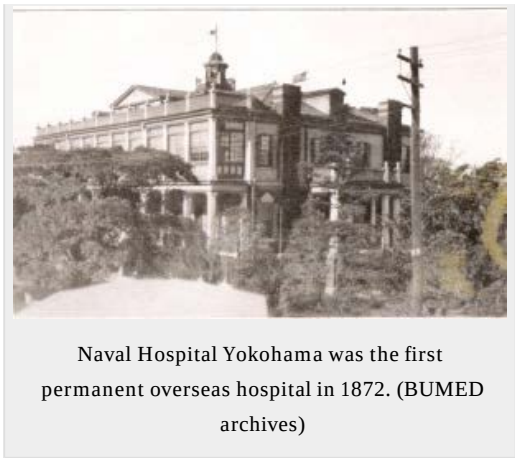
Navy Medicine Live Archives

January 2015 (6)

December 2014 (17)

November 2014 (11)

October 2014 (15)



Naval Hospital Yokohama was the first permanent overseas hospital in 1872. (BUMED archives)

permanent Navy hospitals. The Act directed that the Secretaries of the Navy, the Treasury, and War (Army) serve as “Commissioners of Navy Hospitals” and the unexpended balance of the Marine Hospital Fund (5) — would be placed at their disposal for construction of permanent Navy medical facilities (6). In addition, contributions of 20 cents a month by each naval officer and Sailor would be

used to bolster the fund now known as the “Navy Hospital Fund.”

Ten years lapsed before the Commissioners selected the first hospital site in Washington, D.C. (1821). This was followed by the purchase of other sites in Chelsea, Mass. (1823); Brooklyn, N.Y.; Philadelphia, Penn. (1826); and Norfolk/Portsmouth, Va. (1827). Some of America’s greatest architects including William Strickland and America’s preeminent prison designer John Haviland were hired to design these new symbols of the Medical Department. The first hospital opened in 1830 in Portsmouth, Va. followed soon after by Naval Hospital Philadelphia (aka, the “Naval Asylum.”) Although no longer hospitals, both Haviland’s Portsmouth (now [Naval Medical Center Portsmouth’s](#) “Building 1”) and Strickland’s Asylum (Now the centerpiece of a luxury condominium development called “Naval Square”) still exist as testaments to the grandeur of the original facilities. It is little surprise that many hospital “firsts” in the Navy would

follow the Act of 1811 including: the first uniforms for Navy hospital personnel (1813), Navy hospital administration book (1814) (7), joint medical facility (1862) (8), floating hospitals (1863) (9), West Coast hospital (1870) (10), permanent overseas hospital (1872) (11), teaching hospital (1878) (12), base hospitals (1917), medical center (1935) (13), development of deployable mobile/fleet hospital (1940) (14) and convalescent facilities (1943) .



Haviland's Original Plans for Navy Hospital Portsmouth 1826. (BUMED Archives)

World War II precipitated the largest growth of Navy hospitals in history. By war’s end, the Navy boasted 114 hospitals (52 regular, 20 base hospitals, 19 convalescent hospitals, 16 mobile/fleet hospitals and seven special augmented hospitals). The war may have been the biggest test for Navy Hospitals, but other challenges have followed most notably base realignment and closure. Since the end of World War II the Navy has closed three of the original hospital sites Brooklyn (1948), Chelsea (1974), Philadelphia (1995), as well as major medical facilities that existed in Oakland, Calif. (1995), and St. Albans, N.Y. (1974).

Today Navy hospitals are flagships of executive medicine and leaders in warrior care. They are advanced research centers, and pioneering institutions in the fields of trauma,

September 2014 (20)
August 2014 (14)
July 2014 (13)
June 2014 (8)
May 2014 (11)
April 2014 (9)
March 2014 (14)
February 2014 (7)
January 2014 (7)
December 2013 (7)
November 2013 (12)
October 2013 (7)
September 2013 (14)
August 2013 (13)
July 2013 (11)
June 2013 (22)
May 2013 (15)
April 2013 (14)
March 2013 (14)
February 2013 (14)
January 2013 (12)
December 2012 (11)
November 2012 (11)
October 2012 (7)
September 2012 (9)
August 2012 (12)
July 2012 (13)
June 2012 (17)
May 2012 (22)
April 2012 (14)
March 2012 (13)
February 2012 (14)
January 2012 (13)
December 2011 (13)
November 2011 (20)
October 2011 (22)



Navy Nurses at Naval Hospital, Washington, D.C., c. 1922. (BUMED archives)

mental health, and rehabilitation. As budget constraints and “reinvention” continue to redirect the concept of hospital care, the tenet of patient-centered care at Navy Hospitals is destined to remain a constant.

Footnote.

- (1) In operation from 1804 to 1806, the building used as a naval hospital was at least two stories high contained between six and ten rooms. It was approximately 90 feet long and 50 feet wide. As are most of the structures, past and present, on the Island of Sicily the building was constructed of stone.
- (2) From Charlestown, S.C. to Boston, Mass.
- (3) The original hospital at the Norfolk Navy Yard was a former gunner’s store room and patients shared the two-story building with rigging, a storekeeper’s office and a purser’s issuing room. In 1815, Surgeon Lewis Heerman rented his own house for use as a hospital in lieu of the dilapidated quarters that were available.
- (4) Holcomb, Richard C. *A Century With Norfolk Naval Hospital, 1830-1930*. Portsmouth, Va: Printcraft Publishing Company, 1930. p120.
- (5) In a time before permanent Navy Hospitals, sick and disabled Sailors and Marines could use Marine Hospital facilities (later Public Health Service). Each month 20 cents would be collected from every officer, seaman, and Marine and placed in a “Marine Hospital Fund” to pay for hospital services.
- (6) Langley, Harold. *A History of Medicine in the Early Navy*. Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1995.
- (7) Barton, William P.C. *A Treatise Containing a Plan for the Internal Organization and Government of Marine Hospitals in the United States: Together with A Scheme for Amending and Systematizing the Medical Department of the United States Navy* (1814)
- (8) Naval Hospital Mound City, Il. (1862-1870s) is long considered the first to employ both Army and Navy medical personnel.
- (9) USS *Red Rover* (1863-1865)
- (10) Naval Hospital Mare Island, Calif.
- (11) Naval Hospital Yokohama, Japan
- (12) Navy Hospital Brooklyn, N.Y.
- (13) Naval Medical Center Washington, D.C.
- (14) Mobile Hospital No. 1, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

September 2011 (12)

August 2011 (16)

July 2011 (10)